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SUBJECT: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD LEADER WARNS OF IMPACT OF IRAQ  
VIOLENCE ON KUWAIT AND RISING IRANIAN INFLUENCE

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (C/NF) Summary: The Secretary General of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), Dr. Bader Al-Nashi, told Poloff December 6 that sectarian violence in Iraq was contributing to rising Shi'a-Sunni tensions in Kuwait. While he did not believe violence between the two communities was likely, Al-Nashi warned that any attack by extremists against the religious institutions of the other could dramatically escalate tensions. He said the ICM is trying to play a moderating role, encouraging Sunnis towards moderation and away from extremism, and opposed alleged Saudi plans to back Iraqi Sunnis against Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a. Al-Nashi also expressed concern about rising Iranian influence in the region and said the ICM opposed "anything that increases Iranian influence, whether political or military," an indirect reference to Iran's nuclear program. End summary.

12. (C/NF) In a December 6 meeting, Dr. Bader Al-Nashi, the Secretary General of the Islamic Constitutional Movement

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(ICM), the political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, warned that sectarian violence in Iraq was beginning to have negative ramifications in Kuwait, specifically contributing to rising Shi'a-Sunni tensions. Although sectarian tensions in Kuwait were currently confined to the political arena and the media, Al-Nashi claimed the situation was "ripe" for wider confrontations, particularly between the Shi'a and Salafi Islamists. (Note: Shi'a account for approximately 30 percent of Kuwait's one million citizens. Al-Nashi's brother, Salem Al-Nashi, is the official spokesman for the Salafi Islamic Grouping (aka. the Traditional Salafis), a conservative Salafi political association headed by Khaled Sultan. End note.)

13. (C/NF) Al-Nashi said extremists on both sides were "very extreme," and warned that any attack by Sunni extremists against a Shi'a husseiniya (informal religious gathering place) or by Shi'a extremists against a Sunni mosque could dramatically escalate tensions between the two communities, which have historically maintained relatively good relations in Kuwait. Al-Nashi singled out Shi'a parliamentarians (MPs) Adnan Abdul Samad and Saleh Ashour as most problematic and accused them of playing the sectarian card in Parliament, citing clashes between Ashour and Salafi MP Ahmed Baqer over the recently-passed Zakat Law, opposed by most Shi'a. He said some Shia's attempts to overstate their percentage of the Kuwaiti population, which he estimated to be "between 15-30 percent," were also contributing to tensions. Al-Nashi predicted Kuwaiti Shi'a, buoyed by regional Shi'a ascendancy, would ultimately demand more political influence in the country.

ICM Trying to Play Moderating Role

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¶4. (C/NF) Al-Nashi said the ICM was trying to play a moderating role by encouraging Sunnis both inside and outside of Kuwait towards moderation and away from extremism. "We don't want a regional conflict between the Shi'a and Sunnis," he explained. Al-Nashi said the ICM opposed alleged Saudi plans to support Iraqi Sunnis against Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a, saying the organization believed Sunni Arabs should support both sects in Iraq to prevent widening sectarian conflict. He claimed that ICM leaders had communicated this message of moderation directly to Sunni leaders in Iraq. Al-Nashi emphasized that the ICM was opposed to Iraqi Sunni extremists, like Shaykh Harith Al-Dhari and the Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars.

Serious Concerns about Rising Iranian Influence  
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¶5. (C/NF) Al-Nashi complained that Iran was organizing Shi'a around the region. "We are very concerned about rising Iranian influence in the region and oppose anything that further increases Iran's influence, whether political or military (i.e. Iran's nuclear program)," he said. Al-Nashi emphasized, however, that the ICM supported a peaceful resolution to the current tensions with Iran. He added that, as a small country surrounded by three more powerful nations, the Kuwaiti government must be very careful about how it handles this issue. Asked about the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's support of Hizballah during its recent conflict with Israel, Al-Nashi distanced the ICM somewhat from this position, explaining that "they don't understand the Shi'a like we do in Kuwait."

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